

648 support those of his colleagues. However, chiefs and others do  
[661] sometimes manage to play off one administrator against another  
where there are differences of interest between different departments  
of the Administration, and occasionally appeals by Ngoni chiefs to  
high Administrative officials against the actions of their juniors  
are successful. It is easier for Ngoni to exploit the much greater  
differences of interest between the different sections of the non-  
African community, officials, missions, planters and European and  
Indian traders.

648 In the early years of this century it appears that the chiefs were  
662 approached by labour recruiters, planters, and missionaries who  
wished to gain their favour and utilize this to their own advantage.  
It is difficult to gauge to what extent this practice continues. There  
are one or two recent instances where the missions have clearly  
[797] recognized the importance to them of securing the goodwill of an  
Ngoni in high authority, and it would also appear that some high-  
placed Ngoni have utilized their position to gain from the missions  
services which might not otherwise have been so readily available  
to them. With the cessation of labour recruiting there has been no  
[464] opportunity for recruiters to offer presents to chiefs to sweeten their  
way. The nearest modern equivalent to this practice is found in the  
[466] facilities sometimes provided by mine managers in the Copperbelt  
[574] and elsewhere for Ngoni and other chiefs to visit their tribesmen  
working there, but with the increased stabilization of labour at the  
mines this arrangement has declined in importance. Traders have  
been known to offer bribes to chiefs, but so far as can be judged,  
money and goods handed over in this way often bring no return,  
and indeed some of the objects for which bribes are offered are  
plainly beyond the power of the person concerned to grant.  
Planters also seek to gain the support of those with influence in  
tribal and village life. In matters of this kind it is difficult for the  
observer who spends only a short time in the area to come to any  
quantitative estimates, but it is my impression that as compared with  
comparable situations in West Africa, as reported in the literature,  
there is little bribery in Ngoni society. The first reason that suggests  
itself is the poverty of the Ngoni in relation to their European and  
Indian neighbours. Ngoni do not control any rich natural resources,  
[556] save perhaps for a few timber trees, with which they might be  
persuaded to part. The only form of wealth they possess which is  
of value to their neighbours is their manpower. This was once  
worth buying and perhaps could be bought. Now the chiefs and  
headmen do not have the authority to order their people to go and  
●[461] work for a particular employer. Even if they did, Ngoni make

inefficient workers on the local tobacco farms, where the ties that link them to the near-by villages with their marriages, funerals, and beer parties are still operative, and where the wages are much lower than in Southern Rhodesia. Secondly, Ngoni tend to suspect the good intentions of any non-African, however lavish he may be with his presents, and for this reason are reluctant to enter into agreements with them the social consequences of which they cannot foresee. 648  
662  
[461]  
[186]

## 2. *Rivals of the Paramount Chief*

In pre-conquest times the death of the head of the State was followed by a struggle between rival heirs and by fission of the State. Under British colonial rule these struggles cannot be carried on by force of arms, and it is difficult to split the tribe when there is nowhere for the dissident section to move to and when Administrative recognition is an important condition for political existence. Nevertheless the same struggles continue even if in a different guise. 643  
648

One of the most interesting incidents in the struggles between rival groups for the chieftainship occurred in 1903 and hinged on an aspect of segmentation within the residential system which we have not so far discussed. It was customary for the heir to a large segment founded by his father to place one wife in the headquarters of that segment as well as establishing his beves of wives with their own inferior segments. The eldest son of the selected wife grew up to be in charge of the headquarters and came to be identified with his father's father, the founder of the headquarters, as against his father who was lord of its segment. Thus, for example, Zwangendaba, heir to segment 1, founded segment 18 for his own great wife, but also placed one of his wives in the headquarters of segment 1, the segment founded by his father for his great wife. Similarly Mpezeni, as son of Zwangendaba, placed one of his wives in the headquarters of segment 4, which by then had replaced the annihilated segment 18. In this matter the Ngoni seem to have differed from the Zulu, for among them, according to Bryant, the *isizinda*, son of the placed wife, represents his own father as against the father's main heir.<sup>1</sup> 611  
643

In 1903 the eldest son of Mpezeni I by the selected wife in segment 4 tried to assume the name of his father's father, Zwangendaba. This was in accord with his structural position as representing the interests of the founder of the segment as against those of the

<sup>1</sup> Lancaster, 'Chronology', p. 80; Bryant, *Dictionary*, s.v. *isi-zinda*. cf. Hunter, *Reaction to Conquest*, p. 401. Lancaster implies that the selected wife was called *ikhulu*. This seems unlikely in view of the Zulu use of *i(li)khulu* for the senior left-hand wife.

## IV

## Family Life for the Young Child

*The women's world*

It was the proud boast of the Ngoni aristocrats that their women did no 'work' in the old days. When they spoke thus they were equating 'work' with physical labour, sweeping and cleaning in the hut and compound, fetching wood and water, hoeing in the gardens, and the routine part of preparing and cooking food. The Ngoni women of the former large households had an army of 'helpers' to do all these tasks for them. Though the number of helpers dwindled as the larger households disappeared, the pattern of appropriation of tasks remained in the shrunken households, and hence the Ngoni women were always responsible for a high degree of household management. Larger households in the old days fed fifty to sixty people from their cooking-pots, and though when I lived among them the scale of their households was much smaller, some were still feeding twenty and more people for each meal, apart from the occasional meals served when kinsfolk and strangers came unexpectedly. 562 461 ● 592

I never failed to be impressed with the quiet dignified competence with which Ngoni women managed their household affairs. They did it with an apparent effortlessness, which had its roots in long training and tradition, and in an awareness of responsibility that increased, but weighed less heavily, with age and experience. This competence was always apparent on occasions such as wedding feasts. Then cereal food, meat, vegetable relishes were cooked in vast quantities and served out to the separate groups of guests. [262]

## CHILDREN OF THEIR FATHERS

562 These skills of management, and of order and dignity in  
461 serving, were not however only seen in large-scale operations.

592 The modern young Ngoni wife serving tea and 'scones' to  
her husband's guests sitting on his veranda showed the same  
qualities of careful preparation and considerate service as  
her grandmother had shown presiding over 500 guests at a  
wedding feast.

562 Household management in Ngoni homes included pri-  
marily managing the household staff, allotting their tasks to  
them, settling their quarrels, looking after them when sick,  
marrying off the young ones when the time came. In the  
all-important aspect of feeding a large household and its  
dependents, Ngoni women assumed responsibility for seeing  
that there were enough supplies of different kinds of food  
at hand, for regular consumption and for emergencies. They  
consulted at times with the 'official' who was in charge of  
their 'house' about mobilizing supplies or organizing women  
helpers to cultivate in the gardens. Most significant in the  
eyes of Ngoni and non-Ngoni alike was the task of Ngoni

[264] women of 'dividing the food' at every meal-time. It was a  
key concept in Ngoni culture that at all times when food,  
beer, or other kinds of goods were to be divided out, and  
enjoyed or used by a large number of people, the 'one who  
divided' was an important individual. He, or more often  
she, must be of 'good character', who assumed, or was given,  
the task because he or she knew how to do it, and no one  
questioned the justice or the competence with which the  
dividing was done. Again I was impressed by the almost  
nonchalant air with which Ngoni women ladled out food  
for a large number of individuals and groups. It looked  
[461] so easy. It was obviously not a simple matter. The results  
were always accepted and welcomed, and I never heard any  
grumbles.

593 Central to the organization of the household, and in one  
592 sense the axis on which it revolved, was the care and atten-  
tion the wife gave to her husband. Cooking, including the

## THE THRESHOLD OF ADULTHOOD (II)

the Paramount and all the Ngoni leaders. Part of their excitement was expressed by the youths in whistling, an accomplishment much esteemed by the Ngoni. Herd-boys learned to whistle in one fashion in imitation of birds to lure them to the traps. They whistled in another way to make the cattle move faster to and from the grazing grounds, and in a more provocative way to stir up the bulls to fight. They whistled signals to each other over long distances across the valleys, and they practised whistling at all kinds of times 'to make the tongue more nimble'. By the time they were young men they were skilled whistlers, ready to perform as an accompaniment to the individual dancers celebrating a lion kill, or to the team of youths and girls in the *ngoma* dance. [98] [223] [233] [533]

*Other skills*

After the wealth to be earned from cattle, the excitement of the chase and the fame acquired by lion-hunts, most other pursuits seemed tame to young Ngoni men, especially those related to cultivation. They got some fun however out of the occasional communal hoeing-parties for clearing new land, or terracing land already cleared. A gang of young men would challenge another to do an appointed task in a given time. The two parties would fall to, hoeing in a line, shouting encouragement to each other and insults to their rivals such as: 'You! You are just women. See how you hoe with your arms bent'—with bursts of whistling and singing to keep up the tempo of work. 241 476

The same gang spirit, calling for swift co-ordination and good humour, showed in the role played by young men when a hut was being built. Their part was to dig a wide shallow pit, break up the clods of earth, and pour in water carried to them by the women. Then they trampled the mud until it was mixed ready for the women to plaster on the walls. As they trampled they sang and whistled and stamped with the high knee-bending movement of the *ngoma* dance, emerging finally red-brown from toe to thigh, laughing at [476] [342] [461] [535]

## EARNING A LIVING

249

Labour Ordinances, he can only do so through the District Commissioner's court at Fort Jameson, which may take up more of his time than he thinks the matter worth. In consequence, few actions are brought by farmers against their African labourers and if a man breaks his contract and deserts, no action may be taken against him.

It is not surprising that the efficiency of labour operating under these conditions is low, and that the wages are also low. These two conditions react on one another, and it is misleading to regard the low wages as the only cause of the inefficiency, or the inefficiency as the only cause of the low wages. The practical effect is that men who wish to earn more money than they can get as labourers on the farms at 14s. a month with food go away to Southern Rhodesia. It must be observed, however, that men started going to Southern Rhodesia long before the tobacco farms were opened up to their present extent.

*Labour Migration*

Prior to the European conquest, the only men who had worked for Whites were those employed as carriers by the handful of travellers who passed through the country before 1896, and as carriers and labourers by the North Charterland Exploration Company from 1896 onwards. But immediately after the end of the fighting in 1898, recruiting started among the Ngoni for police work in Southern Rhodesia, and there has been a continual flow of labour migrants south ever since.

There have been considerable fluctuations in the number of men going south since that time, particularly during the two world wars, when the military requirements of the Territory exercised a greater claim. The latest figures for the Eastern Province as a whole show that, in 1946, 23 per cent. of the taxable males registered in the province were absent from the province. Another 17½ per cent. were at work within the province.<sup>1</sup> In May 1947, in two Ngoni counties with a combined total of 1,739 registered taxable males, it was found that 30 per cent. of them were at work in the Eastern Province and a further 43 per cent. were away elsewhere, a total of 73 per cent. away from their villages. Half of those living outside the Eastern Province were classified as 'lost', in that their present whereabouts were unknown to the people at home.<sup>2</sup> These figures exclude all men who have been 'lost' for more than five years.

<sup>1</sup> Labour Department, *Annual Report, 1946*, p. 12.

<sup>2</sup> These figures were given me by the District Commissioner, Fort Jameson.

/12 cont'd/

252 The maize is shelled as required, the grains are pounded in a mortar, and then soaked in water for three or four days, if there is time. They are then pounded again, and the flour winnowed out.

[231] The residue is ground between two stones. The husks obtained after  
[213] the first pounding are used as animal fodder, and in beer making.

The diligent housewife pounds twice a week, each pounding lasting for about three hours. It is usual for a group of women living as  
[461] neighbours to pound at the same time, singing together.

The maize flour is dried in the sun, and then put into a pot or  
[251] basket until required for porridge or beer. Porridge forms the basis  
262 of most meals, although in February and March there may not be enough maize left in the storehouses to make this possible. Adults

[241] eat porridge in solid form, kneading handfuls of it between their fingers before eating, but infants are fed on fluid porridge made from

[253] the ground flour. The herdboys in charge of the cattle may use the milk to make their porridge with. Cooking is women's work, but

[241] men by themselves on a journey or working on the tobacco farms will cook porridge for themselves. Green mealies, usually fried, are eaten when available.

263 Relish is required to go with the porridge, the commonest relishes being pumpkin leaves and hibiscus leaves. There are in addition  
222 many wild fruits and leaves searched for in the bush at their appropriate seasons, while the gardens provide pumpkins, cucumbers,  
241 various kinds of beans and peas, and edible gourds. The most sought-

242 after relish, and one of the most infrequently found, is meat. Chick-

262 ens are given to honoured visitors, while beef, mutton, pork, and goat meat are eaten when they can be found. Livestock other than

[231] chickens are killed for eating only on ceremonial occasions, such as funerals or marriages, but owners not infrequently kill animals and

sell the meat to raise money to pay damages, to finance a journey, or to obtain labour in the garden. Animals that die are usually eaten.

235 Some people keep ducks, pigeons and tame guinea fowl, while such game as is killed on the /13/ hunt is divided among the hunters and

224 taken home to be eaten. Owners of guns sometimes hunt by themselves and sell the meat.

243 forest is cut down and burnt, and another garden cultivated, and  
so the country is rapidly being deforested. The crop is largely  
253 used to make a heady beer, and although Central Africa has been  
happily saved from the curse of European liquor, the native beer  
is a great source of big drunken bouts. Heavy drinking, how-  
ever, does not bring the evil effects that brandy drunkenness  
would entail. The drink is a nutritious and a very sustaining  
food, I know some of the old chiefs who are drunk almost every  
day of their lives by midday, yet they bear up wonderfully. But

[579] these drunken bouts, when whole villages run riot, are the source  
of nearly all quarrels, adultery, bloodshed, and every outburst  
of passion. We have had to denounce the beer drinking as a menace  
[177] to the social order of the country, and for lack of the strong  
restraint of the British Government, which forbids the cutting  
down of trees, we have preached against the deforesting of the land  
as a wicked improvidence. The native church has, of its own  
initiative, taken up the question, and enjoined on the members  
total abstinence, and the preservation of the forests.

461 Three or four months labour are sufficient to provide a family  
with food for the year, and the sale of a sheep or a heifer will buy  
all the clothes the family requires. There is therefore little neces-  
sity to work, and the tendency is to spend the months lounging  
about the village, talking and trifling. Now, happily a more  
197 industrious period is waking, and larger ambitions for cloth and  
461 for stock, are drawing out the men to work. As a mission we  
797 insist on the duty of labour, we refuse church privileges to a man  
if he cannot show that he has been engaged for some months  
each year at some labour centre doing honest work. No moral  
good is ever effected by pampering African pride and indolence,  
and one of the first lessons Christianity has to teach the native, is  
the dignity of labour, and the absolute necessity for the labourer  
to be industrious and honest in the discharge of his work. A  
penny a day is the ordinary wage we give a labourer, and even  
the great majority of my 220 teachers do not receive more than  
1/6 a month.

711 Of course many of the Central Africans have industries of their  
own, smelting, basket making, cloth weaving, wire pulling, and  
so on. But the Ngoni were a handless people until they got a  
spear in their hand. Then they drew themselves up as men, and  
defied the universe. Yet this martial life had an ennobling effect  
on them. It is a curious thing to notice, and a fact which was